A group of patrilineally related families forms the basic economic (i.e., migrational) unit in Mongol society. Pastures are distributed among such units. The structure of the society itself dictates a certain collectivistic working concept. Mongol social groupings are led by tribal chieftains, who are directly responsible to the district Chinese official. Mongol society, unlike other Northwestern societies, has not undergone great changes under Communist influences. Their basic pattern of life has remained the same as it was under the Manchu and Republican regimes.

The Oirats (or Western Mongols:

The Oirats of the Northwest are primarily pastoral nomads. Their chief source of income is cattle, horses, sheep and goats. Because they live in a desert-steppe area they move around in larger or smaller groups depending upon the available resources.

The designation for these small economic and migrational units or camps is "xotn" which includes a group of nuclear families patrilineally related - tracing descent from a common ancestor in the third, fourth, or fifth generation.

Membership in this group can be gained by adoption, by attachment of a daughter's husband in the case of a man with no sons and of poor unrelated families or poor related families on the paternal side. Although some poorer families remained apart from these "xotn" it usually is more worthwhile to add their few cattle, etc., to that of the larger group and render services in return for the benefits gained thereby.

Among the Oirats the closer an individual's relationship to the ancestor, the greater prestige and status he enjoys in this group.

The headman or elder ("axalaci") dwells in a tent situated in the front of the encampment facing south. The remainder of the group is arranged according to the age of the male members in a circle behind the dwelling of the elder. The dependent families are situated in the rear of the circle but still according to the closeness of their relation to the ancestor.

Wives of members of these extended families are also affected by the social set-up; their position and status varies directly with that of their husbands, although a wife's position as far as respect patterns go was never equal to her husband's. A wife observes strict respect for her husband's kinsmen who possess, by reason of age and relationship, a higher position than that of her husband. Very often she will not even pronounce the names of any of these elder gentlemen out of respect for them. The status of the wife grows with that of her husband during his lifetime. When he dies, she can either remain living with his kinsmen, in which case she holds the same position socially that he had during his lifetime, or she can